

February 2010

Queensland Landscapes

Queensland is home to awe-inspiring World Heritage listed natural wonders including the Great Barrier Reef and ancient Daintree Rainforest but did you know there are many other dramatically different landscapes to discover and explore? Here's a taste of Queensland's most stunning locations.

Carnarvon Gorge

The rugged 16,000 hectare Carnarvon Gorge section of Carnarvon National Park is the Queensland central highlands' most popular attractions. Remnant rainforest flourishes in the sheltered side-gorges while cabbage tree palms, ancient cycads, ferns, flowering shrubs and gum trees line the meandering main gorge. Grassy open forest grows on the cliff tops. The park's creeks attract a wide variety of animals including more than 173 species of birds. Visitors can explore the Gorge on 21km of walking track and see some of Australia's finest Aboriginal rock art at the Baloon Cave, Art Gallery and Cathedral Cave. Camping is available at the gorge during school holidays and commercially operated campsites and holiday accommodation are available year round at Takarraka Bush Resort and Carnarvon Gorge Wilderness Lodge. Carnarvon Gorge is located 250km north of Roma in Western Queensland. www.queenslandholidays.com.au/things-to-see-and-do/carnarvon-gorge-carnarvon-national-park/index.cfm

Whitehaven Beach

Whitehaven Beach is a seven kilometre long, pristine silica sand beach on Whitsunday Island, the largest of the 74 islands in the Whitsundays. At the northern end of Whitehaven Beach is Hill Inlet, a stunning inlet where the tide shifts the sand and water to create a beautiful fusion of colours. Access to this beautiful beach is by a day trip on a ferry, on a sailing vessel or luxury cruiser from the mainland, Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour, or from the surrounding island resorts as well as on multi-day charters which include a visit to Whitehaven Beach in their itinerary. Seaplane and helicopter tours also visit this spectacular location. www.tourismwhitsundays.com.au

Great Barrier Reef

The World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef is said to be the world's largest living structure, and the only one visible from outer space. It is also often referred to as the eighth wonder of the world. The Reef stretches more than 2000 kilometres down the east coast of Queensland and is home to tens of thousands of species of brilliantly coloured fish, coral and other marine life including whales, dolphins and turtles. The Great Barrier Reef is a divers' mecca and has some of the best scuba diving and snorkelling in the world. Access to the reef is available from a variety of destinations on the Queensland coastline and is via ultra fast, ultra-modern catamarans, boats, seaplanes and helicopters. www.queenslandholidays.com.au

Lawn Hill Gorge

Lawn Hill Gorge in Boodjamulla National Park, is home to imposing sandstone cliffs, clear waterways and the World-Heritage listed Riversleigh fossil fields. The gorge is a true oasis in the midst of the surrounding dry, semi-arid countryside and is popular spot for campers exploring the vast Gulf country. The waterways of the Gorge are fed by numerous freshwater springs and can be explored by canoe, or on foot along one of six walking tracks through lush vegetation and leading to tranquil waterholes and panoramic views of the surrounding countryside. The local Waanyi Aboriginal people have a long and sacred history with the area and their rock art is found in the Wild Dog Dreaming Art Shelter, an ancient art gallery accessed by bridge across the gorge. Crocodiles can be spied lazing in the waters of the lower gorge, but further up are rock pools and cascade spas where swimming is not only safe, but delightfully refreshing on a hot day. The gorge is located approximately three and a half hour's drive north-west of Mount Isa.

www.queenslandholidays.com.au/destinations/queensland-locations/lawn-hill/index.cfm

Fraser Island

Fraser Island, the largest sand island in the world is located just off the coast of Hervey Bay, three hours drive north of Brisbane. Another of Queensland's World Heritage listed sites, Fraser is also the only place in the world where rainforest grows on sand. The island is more than 120 kilometres long, 30 kilometres across at its widest point and brimming with fabulous natural attractions. Freshwater lakes, crystal clear creeks, wonderful swimming pools, vibrant coloured sand formations and even its own shipwreck, the Maheno which lies on the eastern beach of the island. The magnificent humpback whales, with their young, pass on the western side of the island between August and November. Access to the island is via ferry. Visit the island by hiring a 4WD, join an adventure tour or fly with Air Fraser and land on the beach. There is a range of accommodation on the island including camping, self-contained accommodation, budget resort accommodation and the eco luxury of the island's largest resort, Kingfisher Bay. www.fraserislandholidays.com.au

Chillagoe

This former mining town, located approximately three hours' drive west of Cairns, offers the visitors a colourful mix of outback landscape, mining heritage and Aboriginal art sites but it is the stunning limestone caves that take the spotlight. The caves are found amongst the dry, open woodlands of the Chillagoe-Montana National Park approximately one kilometre from the town and are filled with spectacular formations of stalactites and stalagmites which can be explored on ranger guided tours. There are a number of caves which can also be explored independently as well as the nearby Balancing Rock formation. Another stunning limestone formation, The Archways, can be found approximately 14km to the west of Chillagoe. www.queenslandholidays.com.au/things-to-see-and-do/chillagoe-mungana-caves-national-park/index.cfm

The Channel Country and Windorah

The vast region known as the Channel Country is located in the remote, south west of Queensland, home to the remote town of Birdsville, famous internationally for its annual horse race. This arid landscape comprises a series of ancient flood plains from rivers which flow only intermittently. In Diamantina National Park, the Diamantina River, one of Queensland's longest, cuts braided channels through gibber flats, sand dunes and red-capped ranges. The park supports a large number of rare and threatened plants and animals, including the greater bilby. The rich colours of this park are perfect for eager photographers with the changing landscapes, bush camping experiences and the spectacular wildflowers which emerge after rain. The red sand hills of Windorah have to be

seen to be believed. Located in the heart of the Channel Country, Windorah only has a local population of 80 people but its appeal attracts many travellers each year. As well as the sand hills, other scenic delights include the majestic river red gums lining the banks of the Cooper Creek waterhole and the 12km nature drive through the diverse range of landscapes between Windorah and Cooper's Creek. www.adventureoutback.com.au
www.outbackholidays.info

Girraween National Park

Massive granite outcrops and precariously balanced boulders are the face of Girraween National Park in the south-west corner of Southern Queensland. This remarkable granite habitat is unique in Queensland and the foundations for the dramatic landscape occurred roughly 225 million years ago when the continent collided with an oceanic plate and ocean sediments were flung from offshore into this area. Over the years, erosion has revealed the bare granite that is now such a feature of the park. The granite is found with 11,800 hectares of open forest with approximately 30km of tracks to explore. During Spring the region puts on a spectacular natural wildflower show. Girraween is approximately 260km by road from Brisbane. www.southerndownsholidays.com.au

Daintree National Park

The Daintree is one of oldest surviving rainforests in the world and is an ancient living museum rich with hundreds of species of plants, insects, reptiles, butterflies and marsupials. The Daintree Cape Tribulation coast is where the Great Barrier Reef and the Daintree rainforest meet, the only place in the world where two World Heritage areas exist side by side. Daintree National Park consists of long sandy beaches, rocky headlands and steep mountain ranges intersected by numerous creeks and rivers. It is also home to one of Australia's last extensive stands of lowland rainforest. Features of the park include impenetrable ranges, rising steeply from the coast and blanketed with dense upland rainforests. The Cape Tribulation Section of Daintree National Park (about 17,000ha) stretches in a narrow, intermittent strip from the Daintree River in the south to the Bloomfield River in the north. Cruises are available on the Daintree River and southern road access to the rainforest is via a cable vehicle across the river. The Daintree National Park is just under two hours drive north of Cairns. www.cairnsgreatbarrierreef.org.au

Gondwana Rainforest

The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia, the most ancient form of vegetation in Australia, are located in southern Queensland in the Gold Coast Hinterland at Lamington and Springbrook National Parks, and into northern New South Wales. They include a mix of warm temperate, cool temperate, sub-tropical and dry rainforests, the world's most extensive subtropical rainforest and nearly all of the world's Antarctic Beech cool temperate rainforest. Approximately two million people visit this World Heritage-listed area each year which includes the Lamington and Springbrook National Parks. Rainforests on both sides of the border contain more frog, snake, bird and marsupial species than anywhere else in Australia and is home to many rare and threatened plants and animals and ancient life forms. The Lamington National Park is home for ground-dwelling birds such as the rare Albert's lyrebird and the endangered eastern bristlebird. Both parks are easily accessible and contain extensive walking tracks and Springbrook is where visitors will find the famous Natural Bridge formation and at night join a nocturnal tour to see the delicate glow-worms. www.verygoldcoast.com/destinations

Undara

The Undara Lava Tubes were formed more than 190,000 years ago when a major volcano in the McBride volcanic province erupted, its molten lava flowing down a dry river bed. As the eruption slowed and then stopped, the lava drained out of the tubes leaving a series of long, hollow tunnels. Undara lies three and a half hours inland from Cairns in Tropical North Queensland's Gulf Savannah. One of the lava flows from Undara runs for more than 160 kilometres making it one of the longest flows from a single volcano on earth in modern geological times. Hidden within these tubes and caves is also a colony of approximately 40,000 bats. Accommodation is available near the caves at Undara Experience from camping to beautifully-restored railway carriages and guided tours are available of the tubes and surrounding areas. www.undara.com.au

Mareeba & Tyto Wetlands

Two special wetland areas can be found in north Queensland – one at Mareeba, inland from Cairns and the other at Ingham, north of Townsville.

The Mareeba Tropical Savanna and Wetland Reserve provide a unique outback experience. The lagoons and channels of the wetlands lie in a Reserve of more than 200 hectares and are a sanctuary for much of tropical Australia's savanna and wetland wildlife and cultural heritage. This is a unique community conservation project combining valuable conservation work with environmental education and nature based tourism including such critical programmes as the re-introduction of the Gouldian Finch. It is also a gateway to Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf Savannah, and provides an excellent base from which to visit the World Heritage listed Wet Tropics Rainforests and Great Barrier Reef, as well as the Cairns Highlands and Atherton Tablelands. www.mareebawetlands.org

The Tyto Wetlands incorporate lagoons, interpretive signs, hides and lookouts where visitors can appreciate over 200 different species of native birds amongst other wildlife. Tyto is a unique experience because it gives people the chance to observe this unique facet of nature while not interfering with the habitat and surrounds. The wetlands feature extensive walking tracks which allow visitors to explore the park at their own pace. The park's name is derived from one of the birdlife inhabitants that you see when you visit – The Eastern Grass Owl (Tyto Capensis). This endangered species is best seen from the observation deck as it flies out at dusk. www.tytowetlands.com.au